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THE LIBYAN SECURITY CONTINUUM: THE IMPACT OF THE LIBYAN CRISIS ON THE NORTH AFRICAN/SAHELIAN REGIONAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the impact of the Libyan crisis on the regional environment in North Africa/the Sahel. More specifically the paper shows that, despite international attempts to resolve the crisis, the situation remains very difficult in Libya with the persistence of instability and radical militancy and a dramatic increase in illegal trafficking, particularly human trafficking. In turn, this has dramatically affected the regional scene, especially due to the upsurge in jihadi activities as a result of Libya having been a "safe heaven" for jihadists since 2011, destabilizing Tunisia and the Sahel countries. Algeria, also fearing destabilization from Libya, has been heavily involved in the various initiatives to restore security in the country. However, overall divergent interests and regional competition have so far limited the impact of such initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, and further to the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, the country has been plunged into chaos. Indeed, the country has been torn apart by competing political factions and powerful militias, now mostly coalesced around the internationally supported Government of National Accord (GNA) established in Tripoli, and the leadership of the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), the House of Representatives (HoR) and the rival government based in Al-Bayda, in the east of the country. Worse, jihadi organizations, taking advantage of this chaos, especially Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Islamic State (IS), have established themselves in Libya, which they are using as a rear base and from which they have been launching attacks in neighbouring countries, including Algeria in 2013 and Tunisia in 2015–16.

The strategic importance of Libya to these groups is clear from an interview with IS leader in Libya Abu Nabil Al Anbari (aka Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani) in September 2015 in IS's online magazine *Dabiq*, in which he explained that Libya "is in Africa and south of Europe. [...] It is also a gate to the African desert stretching to a number of African countries." He also explained that given the important oil and natural gas resources of Libya and European countries' reliance on them, "The control of the Islamic State over this region will lead to economic breakdowns especially for Italy and the rest of the European states."[2] Furthermore, when asked where his recruits came

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2 "Interview with Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani", in *Dabiq*, No. 11 (September 2015), p. 63, https://clarionproject.org/?p=8846.

from, he explained that these were essentially from "Africa, the Islamic Maghrib, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula", underlining the centrality of Libya and its strategic importance in the jihadi organization's perspective.

In addition to the jihadi threat, all kinds of criminal activities have developed in and from Libya and affected its neighbours, including migrant smuggling and, above all, weapons trafficking. The continued chaos in Libya in the context of the collapse of IS in the Middle East raises further concerns in the light of speculation that most of the North African foreign fighters who went to Syria or Iraq and fought with IS or Al-Qaeda's affiliates in Syria, especially Al-Nusra Front, might decide to migrate to Libya and reinforce the jihadi affiliates of IS or Al-Qaeda there. Indeed, in the Middle East these fighters have acquired a high level of both military and radical ideological training, as well as first-hand fighting experience, in addition to establishing networks with fellow jihadists from around the world. This could therefore further destabilize the whole regional system in North Africa and in the Sahel.

Those concerns are strongly reflected in the various analyses provided by officials and analysts from neighbouring countries. In that regard, a former Algerian minister of foreign affairs argued in 2014 that "Libya as a 'failed State' has destabilized the whole region with weapons trafficking which developed there, as well as the fact that this country has become a safe haven for jihadi groups" (Interviewee 1). Another Algerian official considered that "in Libya, anyone can acquire any kind of weapon he wants provided that he can pay for it" (Interviewee 2). Michaël Ayari, Tunisia senior analyst for the International Crisis Group, considers for his part that while Tunisia was able to contain jihadi organizations in 2016–17, "the real problem is Libyan and the mess there. The issue of the jihadi returnees from the Middle East who might decide to go to Libya, all of the trafficking and the networks there which are connected to Tunisia, that's the real danger for the coming years" (Interview A). That analysis was shared by a Sahelian security official who argued that one the main problems in the Sahel region is the absence of any control in Libya, especially in the south. In the south, he explained, "you find all kind of trafficking especially which benefitted to Al-Qaeda and other groups". For him, the absence of control in southern Libya allowed the jihadi groups to retreat from northern Mali during the French-led Serval military operation to the Fezzan (south of Libya) and reconstitute themselves there (Interviewee 3). Furthermore, the fighters of IS have been reported fleeing north Libya and going to the south, some to the region of Uwaynat near the Algerian border, along with tens of African fighters, including some from the Sudanese Group of Devotion to the Quran and Sunna (*Jama'at al-I'tisam bil-Quran wa'l-Sunna*), which supported IS and many of whose fighters joined IS in Libya (McGregor 2017: 21).

Those concerns with regard to weapons smuggling and the arrival of foreign fighters in Libya have been continually raised since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 by regional actors, who point to them as the main threats to regional security and stability. However, these analyses only partially reflect the evolution of the security scene in Libya itself. Indeed, while the security situation remains unstable, the collapse of the state in Libya has also led to the development of a new illegal economy, not only in the form of weapons smuggling but also in the form of illegal cross-border transactions, especially illegal immigration/human trafficking. This further complicates unresolved political issues linked to non-Arab minorities in Libya such as the Tebu or Tuareg and could well have a wider impact on neighbouring countries over the coming years. However, as

the interviews conducted during fieldwork in Algeria, Tunisia, Mali and Mauritania between 2013 and 2018 indicate, analysts and officials remain focused on what they consider the most pressing threats – jihadists in southern Libya and weapons smuggling. Furthermore, those analyses often fail to take into account the complexity of Islamist militancy in Libya and the dangerous policies put in place to fight terrorism there. Indeed, several actors, especially Khalifa Haftar, conflate jihadists with all Islamists and apply repression to both categories without distinction. This in turn creates a strong factor for further radicalism and extremism in Libya.

In this context, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the "Libyan security continuum", that is, the destabilizing impact and consequences of the current security situation in Libya on the North African/Sahelian regional system. More specifically, this paper aims at addressing the following questions: (1) What are the neighbouring countries' main concerns about the impact of the Libya crisis in the current moment? (2) To what extent are these concerns appropriate given the current dynamics in Libya? (3) Are these still key issues, or has the evolving situation made other issues more prominent? (4) Is a focus on security concerns a driving force in the different strategies and options of Libya's neighbours (Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt) in their foreign policy towards Libya? (5) How do we explain divergences in their approaches, and what is their impact?

Based on this, the next section of this paper offers an assessment of the situation in Libya in 2018 and above all focuses on recent developments in the area of illegal human trafficking. It also analyses the evolution of Islamist militancy in Libya. Section 2 then deals with the perception of the "Libyan risk" by Tunisia, Algeria and the Sahel.

1. 2016 ONWARDS: CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE SITUATION IN LIBYA

The level of violence has generally abated in Libya since the second civil conflict in 2014–15. Nevertheless, the drivers of this conflict, and the resulting institutional and political splits, persist: an impasse between opposing political blocs stalled Libya's post-2011 transition and efforts to mediate between rivals have thus far proved unsuccessful.[3] The security sphere remains fragmented – in some areas more fragmented than during the 2014–15 period – with local control

3 The most significant efforts have been led by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and resulted in the signing of a power-sharing agreement in Skhirat, Morocco, in December 2015. This agreement intended to merge Libya's two competing political authorities – the eastern House of Representatives (HoR) and the Tripoli-based General National Congress (GNC) – into a single administration. The legislative function would be filled by the HoR, with the GNC, refashioned as the High Council of State, acting in an advisory capacity. The executive function would be fulfilled by a Government of National Accord (GNA), of which the nucleus, the Presidency Council, was named in an annex to the agreement. The agreement has effectively been dead in the water since the HoR has refused to ratify the GNA and has continued to work with its own government in the eastern city of Bayda. The GNA is, moreover, very weak and has limited control and influence on the ground. UNSMIL has over recent months been attempting to reinvigorate the dialogue process, putting in place a road map to move forward from the stalled Skhirat agreement towards parliamentary and legislative elections later this year (since postponed to 2019). The first step of this road map aimed to amend the Skhirat agreement to enable its acceptance by the HoR, though the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative Ghassan Salamé has himself admitted that this has "little chance of being passed" (UN Security Council 2018). UNSMIL has, however, been moving forward with the next steps of the road map, particularly through voter registration ahead of elections, and holding consultation meetings across the country as part of its National Conference. Other significant mediation initiatives have been carried out, for example, by Egypt and France. Egypt has focused on attempts to reunify Libya's armed forces, while a recent meeting in Paris aimed to get what France viewed as the "main players" to commit to an agreement, including to hold elections later this year. See Irish and Pennetier (2018).

split between groups formed along regional, tribal and ideological lines. No real progress has been made in disarming or integrating these actors, and the conflict has continued over the past three years, albeit in a more localized and low-intensity form, driven by differing visions of the Libyan state, competition for resources and fears of not having certain administrative, cultural and economic rights respected.

On the surface, therefore, it appears that concerns relating to the circulation of militants and weapons should remain at the forefront of regional and European policymakers' attention: border control remains weak, and militant groups continue to exploit the spaces offered by the fragmented security sphere, arguably in an even more subtle way since IS militants were pushed out of Sirte in 2016 and IS has ceased to operate as a territorial entity.

However, analyses in other fields such as political economy highlight the importance of going beyond these surface trends in assessing dynamics in Libya, and by extension Libya's impact on the North Africa/Sahel regional system (see, for example, Lewis 2018). While weapons trafficking continues, a closer look at cross-border transactions in Libya's south indicates that the movement of people from neighbouring countries into Libya, in the context of unresolved political issues relating to non-Arab minority communities' citizenship rights, may well prove a more significant issue for the region going forward. Similarly, while militant groups will likely continue to exploit Libyan territory, it is also important to consider the political situation of Islamist and militant groups in Libya and the potential for further radicalization and violence. Early attention from policymakers on these issues could well alleviate their future regional impact.

1.1 THE POLITICS OF TRAFFICKING

In the absence of any credible scheme to disarm actors in Libya, the country remains awash with weapons and regional governments continue to fear the impact of this on the availability of weapons to insurgents in their own countries.[4] The conditions that facilitated a major expansion of trafficking activities through southern Libya – particularly marginalization, political isolation and a breakdown of the local economy – have not changed, and trafficking remains a key source of income for people in the region (Al-Arabi 2018). However, over the past three years traffickers have changed the way they work, with the smuggling of migrants growing significantly. At the same time, the difficulties of migrating legally into Libya, coupled with the more favourable (though still dire) economic situation in Libya compared with some neighbouring countries, have resulted in irregular migration from these countries into Libya's south. The intersection of this, the smuggling of migrants through Libya to Europe, the presence of foreign opposition groups and mercenary fighters, and unresolved political issues linked to southern Libya's non-Arab minority communities has resulted in cross-border population movement becoming one of the most sensitive current issues in Libya. Although these sensitivities mean that there are no clear statistics regarding the size of this phenomenon, it may well have more significant future effects across the region than the persistence of weapons trafficking.

4 For most government officials in the region, the major threat comes from weapons traffickers in Libya who managed to loot the stocks of the Libyan army and sell them to the transnational jihadi organizations. This theme appeared extensively in the Sahel as well as, for example, in Algeria during 2011–12 when AQIM used Semtex explosives against the Algerian security services. Semtex was available only in the stocks of the Libyan army and was smuggled to Algeria to the jihadi groups in the context of the collapse of Gaddafi. See Harchaoui (2018: 10).

Although weapons do continue to be trafficked out of Libya, the arms trade has largely been superseded by migrant smuggling, as well as the smuggling of other products such as drugs and fuel. As the post-2014 crisis persisted, local groups' demand for weapons and ammunition increased, and stockpiles that fed the initial glut in 2011 have been depleted (Conflict Armament Research 2016). Indeed, evidence suggests that increased demand in Libya has caused flows of weapons to reverse in some circumstances, with trafficking occurring from the region into Libya (Conflict Armament Research 2016). While the circulation of weapons remains a concern, therefore, particularly across the southern border, it is less acute than it was several years ago, and in some respects the damage has already been done insofar as various actors across the region have been (increasingly) militarized and are likely to remain so regardless of flows from Libya.

The migrant smuggling industry, on the other hand, has significantly increased in scope (Al-Arabi 2018) and has been a key factor in bringing issues of population movement and demographic change to the fore.[5] Increased migration flows have tended to be seen as less of a problem for regional countries than other forms of trafficking, except in relation to the circulation of militants, as most countries in the region are source or transit countries for migrants. Until recently, migrant smuggling was not seen by the Libyan public at large as being a major issue, with the exception of certain cities where smuggling was particularly prevalent (Al-Arabi 2018).[6] However, increased pressure from European governments on Libya to reduce flows across the Mediterranean, and increased internal public pressure, have contributed to Libyan authorities' refocusing on the south. The conflict in the southern city of Sebha has also been a major factor in this.[7]

This new focus on the south and the border region has manifested in a broader concern regarding population movements in the area, a concern that is highly politicized. This is clear in Libyan authorities' recent statements on the issue, in which they link inward migration with mercenary fighters. For example, in a February 2018 statement regarding the fighting in Sebha, the Presidency Council of the internationally recognized GNA stated that "any attempts to change the demographic reality in our beloved South will be doomed to fail", referring to "repeated attacks carried out by groups of mercenaries" (GNA Presidency Council 2018). A similar discourse can be seen from the self-styled LNA's general command,[8] which in March gave African immigrants ten days to leave the country, calling on local notables to "lift social protection [*raf' al-ghitaa' al-ijtima'i*] from all of those who have contributed in any way to protecting, sheltering or helping incoming Africans [*al-wafidin al-afariqa*], behaviour which has led to the destabilizing of Libya's southern regions", going on to make an implicit link between Africans from neighbouring countries settling in Libya

5 Another key factor is the migration of southern Libyans to the cities of the northern coast, in particular Tripoli, as a result of conflicts and economic collapse in the south.

6 See also EUI research team's observations. The widely circulated CNN documentary on "slave markets" was one of the factors that contributed to it becoming more of a public opinion issue.

7 Clashes occurred intermittently for several months between armed groups from the Tebu and Awlad Suleiman communities, with significant impact on the local population. See, for example, REACH Initiative (2018) and "Tebu Seem to Gain Upper Hand on Awlad Sulieman in Latest Sebha Fighting", in *Libya Herald*, 14 May 2018, https://www.libyaherald.com/?p=116191.

8 The Libyan National Army (LNA) was formed by Khalifa Haftar, a former Libyan army general, and launched Operation Dignity in May 2014 targeting Islamist groups. This coalition of former military, tribal and ideological militias and volunteers was recognized by the HoR, and currently controls much of eastern Libya.

and armed groups in the south (LNA General Command 2018).[9]

While evidence from Libyan sources indicates that population movement from neighbouring countries into Libya is occurring (Al-Arabi 2018, Horiyat Group 2015; see also Tubiana and Gramizzi 2017),[10] particularly among members of the Tebu and Tuareg communities, there are no clear statistics to indicate the magnitude of this phenomenon. Moreover, while reports about the presence of opposition groups and mercenaries from neighbouring countries also appear to be based at least in part in truth (Tubiana and Gramizzi 2017),[11] there is no evidence that this is linked in a significant way to wider population movement. Indeed, incoming populations include whole families who have settled in and around local southern towns.[12]

Moreover, accusations of being (foreign) mercenary fighters are bound up in particular local attitudes towards the Tebu and Tuareg communities. These groups live in the region spanning southern Libya, parts of Chad, Niger, Algeria and Mali, and are minority communities in Libya with particular concerns about their rights to citizenship and representation in the future Libyan state (Gazzini 2017, Daragahi 2014).[13] Some Tebu and Tuareg who have been in Libya for decades have not received Libyan nationality. Unresolved by any of Libya's post-2011 governments and by the draft constitution, this issue is only complicated further by incoming undocumented migration. Southern notables from Arab communities strongly reject the idea of allowing the permanent settlement of migrants,[14] a term likely to encompass those that have settled in Libya since 2011, and likely to stem both from fears for their own communities and from broader negative attitudes towards these minority communities,[15] particularly following persistent local conflicts in the south since 2011.[16] However, as time passes, it will become increasingly difficult to differentiate recent

9 "The Central Command of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces calls on African brothers arriving from neighbouring African countries to not get swept up into [*al-injirar waraa'*] illegal militias and not to be exploited to destabilize the Libyan South" (LNA General Command 2018).

10 In a telephone interview with the EUI research team (May 2018), a Libyan civil society activist based in Tripoli but well connected in southern Libya said that he was no longer willing to travel to some regions to the south of Sebha, saying these areas feel like they are "not Libya anymore" (Interviewee 14). An influential Libyan reconciliation activist echoed this sentiment, though not the unwillingness to travel, regarding a recent trip to the southern town of Ubari. In a telephone interview (June 2018) with the EUI research team, a Libyan researcher who recently travelled to Ghat noted that compared with 2012, there is an increased number of Algerian Tuareg living in the area surrounding the town. The relationship between this incoming community and the Tuareg of the town of Ghat was not good. The researcher also noted that compared with 2012 there are fewer members of the Arab community living in the town (Interviewee 15).

11 The presence in Libya of armed rebel movements from neighbouring countries such as Chad and Sudan pre-dates 2011.

12 Correspondence with a Libyan analyst who works with NGOs and international organizations in southern Libya, June 2018.

13 Ibid. The Libyan researcher mentioned that the Libyan Tuareg in Ghat felt that nothing connected them to Tripoli except "electricity cables", referring to their sentiments of marginalization and potentially racially motivated exclusion.

14 EUI research team's observations within the framework of the Libyan Social Dialogue project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. For more information on this project, see the Middle East Directions Programme website: *Libya Initiative*, http://middleeastdirections.eu/?p=927.

15 Particularly fears that these communities are seeking to secure their rights through military and demographic leverage (Al-Arabi 2018). The aforementioned Libyan civil society activist claimed that the Tebu in particular were using incoming mercenaries as a way to impose a new social reality (Interviewee 14).

16 It is very difficult, particularly given the highly limited access to Libya's remote border regions, to assess the extent to which these concerns regarding the Tebu and Tuareg communities are grounded in reality or perception. For example, the aforementioned Libyan researcher said that in a recent trip to the south-western town of Traghen,

migrants from those with legitimate claims to citizenship.[17]

No action appears to have yet been taken to halt or reverse demographic change in southern Libya; however, as it becomes a more significant issue in Libyan public opinion, it is possible that certain actors will seek to do so. Irrespective of this, population changes and perceptions of it have the potential to significantly impact the region in the longer term. Whether or not this was their intention, a proportion of actors from neighbouring countries settling in Libya will have become militarized either through involvement in trafficking networks (Al-Arabi 2018), in local conflicts,[18] or through the widespread possession of weapons for self-defence purposes. The future prospects for these populations are uncertain, as their countries of origin are unlikely to welcome the return of armed actors, and the statements referred to above indicate that the Libyan authorities' views match those of southern notables in rejecting the permanent settlement of recent migrants.

If policymakers were to take a proactive approach to this issue and begin discussions with the countries bordering Libya, this could help reduce the potential impact of population movements and statelessness in these border areas. An important first step could be working with local partners to attempt mapping some of these recent population movements, in terms of numbers and types of people involved. Some of Libya's neighbours have experience in disarming rebel groups, and support could be provided to help develop these migrant populations' regions of origin. On the other hand, should countries in the region and European policymakers continue to adopt a security approach which focuses on preventing weapons trafficking and other forms of smuggling, this might well lead to increased militarization of smugglers, and of the broader population in border regions. Moreover, a serious engagement with the issue of local population change in southern Libya could help improve European countries' reputations within Libya and counter some popular narratives that EU countries, particularly France and Italy, are either indifferent to the general situation in southern Libya, or are even fuelling population change as a way to extend their influence.[19]

1.2 LIBYAN MILITANCY

Similar to the issue of weapons trafficking, an assessment of the impact of the situation in Libya on regional militancy should not ignore local Libyan political dynamics. As in the 2011–16 period, regional militants and militant groups continue to have access to Libyan territory, training and

the only town in the Murzuq-Gatroun area that is not inhabited by a Tebu majority, the local Arabized *ahali* population complained of the behaviour of local Tebu groups, including at checkpoints, and that they had occupied an (unfinished) housing development claiming that they were marginalized from economic and development projects in the Gaddafi era (Interviewee 15). This echoes the accounts Al-Arabi relied on in his analysis of the region as a whole (see Al-Arabi 2018); however, there is equally need for caution given that there appears to be a pervasive negative attitude toward the Tebu community in particular (EUI research team's observations within the framework of the Libyan Social Dialogue).

17 Some members of the Tebu and Tuareg communities who were born in Libya or who migrated there during the 1980s and 1990s have struggled to get full Libyan citizenship. More recent migration makes it more difficult to differentiate those that have a legitimate claim to Libyan citizenship and those that do not. See, for example, Gazzini (2017) and Daragahi (2014).

18 Some may also have formed links with non-Libyan rebel groups or militant groups present in the south, although there is not sufficient evidence to draw conclusions.

19 EUI research team's observations in the framework of Libyan Social Dialogue.

weapons (Wehrey 2017), which in the previous period was significant in allowing them to expand and carry out spectacular attacks. However, this access has arguably reduced over the last three years, with several foreign airstrikes targeting AQIM militants in southern Libya,[20] and foreign airstrikes and local Libyan fighters disrupting a network linked to the training and equipping of Tunisian militants.[21] The significant presence of foreign fighters within the ranks of IS in Libya, including significant contingents from North, East and West Africa (Zelin 2018), and the possibility of their returning to their countries of origin, has been of particular significance to actors in the North Africa/Sahel regional system, particularly following the 2016 Misratan-led campaign to oust IS militants from their territorial stronghold in Sirte, in the centre of Libya's coastline.[22] However, there is limited evidence of large numbers of fighters returning to their countries of origin, and the group's strategy appears to remain focused on Libya.[23] While these groups continue to pose a regional threat, this does not appear to be more significant than in the 2011–16 period and some groups may even be less dependent on access to Libya than previously.

Nevertheless, local political dynamics in Libya could well drive increased radicalization over the coming years that could produce new militant threats or fuel existing groups. As Islamists have come under increasing pressure in Libya since the launch of Operation Dignity in mid-2014,[24] alliances have formed between various groups and actors with convergent interests, including jihadist groups, Islamist groups and actors with political or social grievances. This is particularly true in respect of groups linked to the eastern Libyan cities of Derna and Benghazi.

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20 Among the most recent of these took place in March 2018, near Ubari (US Africa Command 2018). AQIM militants are believed to have some links with smugglers in the region, though not to have significant support (Porter 2017; interview between EUI research team and a US-based security analyst; and interview between EUI research team and Libyan civil society activist, May 2018). The Libyan civil society activist who closely follows issues linked to jihadist groups said that certain communities in the south were more vulnerable to becoming involved with AQIM due to links between the organization and their relatives from northern Mali. He confirmed that his contacts in southern Libya were aware of a jihadist presence in the area, particularly around Brak al-Shati. Although the contacts said the group in question was IS, the activist estimated their claim was based on the fact that the "jihadi flag is there" and that they may not differentiate between IS and Al-Qaeda (Interviewee 14).

21 There was a network linked to Ansar Al-Sharia in Tunisia and IS operating in north-west Libya, in the Sabratha area, which was reportedly involved in militant attacks taking place in Tunisia in 2015 and early 2016. The network appears to have been Tunisia-focused and to have been largely disrupted following airstrikes and fighting in the area in early 2016. See, for example, Varvelli (2017).

22 IS first appeared in Libya in the eastern city of Derna. Local Islamist and jihadist forces ousted the group from the city in mid-2015, and militants affiliated with the organization subsequently took control of Sirte. Although there was a broad rejection of IS militants across Libya, other factors were significant in the final decision to launch the 'al-Bonyan al-Marsous' operation to oust militants from Sirte, including the perception that being involved in such a campaign would gain factions favour with the international community.

23 The May attack targeting the headquarters of the High National Election Commission (HNEC) in Tripoli indicates that the group's strategy is to retain its foothold in Libya through ensuring continued instability. HNEC had recently been running a voter registration campaign as the UN road map, confirmed in the recent Paris meeting, involved holding elections later this year, though this has since been postponed. Recent attacks indicate that IS militants are primarily present in desert areas to the south of Sirte and in the south, as well as maintaining cells in key Libyan cities such as Tripoli (this was also confirmed by the Libyan civil society activist). The general rejection of the group in Libya and the reintegration of certain marginalized communities into the political process means that IS will likely struggle to rebuild its capacities to the same level as previously.

24 A military campaign launched by Khalifa Haftar in mid-2014, with the stated aim of combating "terrorists", a term that Haftar's LNA General Command applies to a wide range of Islamist groups.

While the alliances of various Islamist and jihadist groups in Libya, and the relationships between members of each group, are becoming increasingly complex, it is not clear that efforts have been made by local actors, principal among them Khalifa Haftar's LNA and its allies, to distinguish between these different actors and to pursue reconciliation efforts with non-radicalized actors. While it is clear that certain groups and individuals targeted by Haftar, such as those affiliated to IS, posed a threat to Libyan society, it is equally clear that the fight against "terrorism" is a political as much as a security issue and should be viewed as such. It appears that whole, hybrid coalitions, such as the Derna Protection Forces and any supporters,[25] are being branded as terrorist groups and terrorist sympathizers, despite the fact that some of its support stemmed from political opposition to Haftar and his allies more than real ideological synergies (Salem 2018).

If all of these actors within and supporting (at one time or another) the coalition are subject to the same treatment, marginalization and punishment, without prospects for local reconciliation, this would likely drive increased radicalization in the medium term, with the potential to increase the regional militant threat should they seek to join and bolster groups based in the Sahel, or to act as spoilers to any stabilization in Libya. Although it is difficult to differentiate various kinds of jihadist, Islamist and other political actors, it would be important for policymakers to push for differentiation, reconciliation and reintegration of those elements that would be willing to work within a wider national framework.

In this regard, it would also be important for policymakers to take a medium- to long-term view of other religious actors in Libya, particularly Madkhali Salafist groups who have been playing an increasing role in cities across Libya including Tripoli, Sabratha and Zuwara and within the LNA. A strain of Salafism generally considered "quietest" or non-revolutionary because of its obedience to the incumbent ruler (*wali al-amr*), Madkhali Salafists in Libya are notable for having become militarized and having taken on significant law enforcement roles (Al-Arabi 2018, Ali 2017, Wehrey 2016). Further understanding of these ideological changes, as well as of the extent to which different Madkhali groups across the country are connected with one another, will be important for understanding what role they are likely to play in the future, and under what circumstances (if any) they have the potential to act as spoilers to political and stabilization processes.

Without a doubt, migration and definitions of terrorist actors have become highly politicized in Libya and the region as a whole, and European policymakers seeking to work with partners to stabilize the region will have to balance the interests of different Libyan and regional actors, all claiming to act in the interests of regional security. The following section of the paper will refer to regional states' perceptions of the situation in Libya and how it impacts their security concerns. As we shall see, in spite of those new security trends in Libya, most of the regional actors continue to perceive weapons smuggling and jihadist threats as the most acute issues at the exclusion of all

25 This was a rebranding of the Mujahidin Shura Council of Derna and its Surroundings. The core of this coalition was made up of Islamist militia to Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade and it brought together a range of actors including some members of Ansar Al-Sharia in Derna, and allegedly some foreign fighters. The coalition pushed IS militants out of the city in June 2015 with the support of the local population. In the recent military campaign it received much less local support, though some young people opposed to Haftar did fight with it. The group itself is not ideologically homogeneous, with differences between the older and younger generations, and between leaders and rank-and-file membership (Salem 2017 and 2018; conversations between the EUI research team and the Libyan researcher based in Tripoli, June 2018).

the others. We will also see that regional competition and rivalry also plays an important role in shaping their attitudes and strategies towards Libya, especially in the case of Algeria.

2. THE IMPACT OF THE LIBYA SITUATION ON THE REGIONAL STATES

2.1 TUNISIA

Tunisia has been greatly and directly destabilized by the collapse of the Libyan state, notably in terms of its security, political stability and economy, representing a particular threat to its democratic transition especially in 2015–16. Indeed, the worst terrorist attacks that have occurred in the country have originated in Libya and been conducted by young Tunisians belonging to IS who trained in Libya. Among these, the June 2015 attack in the seaside resort of Sousse, in which thirty-eight Western tourists were killed, remains to this day the deadliest terrorist attack in the history of Tunisia. These spectacular assaults against Tunisia in the context of an ongoing guerrilla war linked to AQIM in the region of Chaambi Mountain climaxed during the "battle of Ben Guerdane" in March 2016, when over 100 IS fighters from Libya attempted to take control of this border city. Their goal was to establish an "emirate" there that would spill over to the rest of Tunisia (Attia 2018). In that regard, Michaël Ayari explained that, thinking they had the support of the population, "the dream and goal of the jihadists is to go from Libya to Ben Guerdane and from there, with the support of the population, to provoke a general explosion which would lead to the collapse of Algeria" (Interview A).

In fact, jihad-related violence in Tunisia itself started in 2011, shortly after the collapse of the Ben Ali regime, with the release of over 2,500 prisoners who had been jailed for radicalism and violence. Shortly thereafter, several key figures from the Tunisian jihad scene of the 1990s and 2000s, especially Seifallah Ben Hassine (aka Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi) and Slim Gnetry (aka Abu Ayub al-Tunisi), decided to create a Salafi jihad organization called Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST). However, AST saw the Tunisian political transition and its own activities as an intermediary step whose goal was to prepare and mobilize Tunisian society for the ultimate step: the jihad (Interview G). As Malka and Balboni (2016) explain, this was a sort of "hybrid Jihadi-Salafism" which fully endorsed Al-Qaeda's ideas of violence while focusing on the social and political issues "to reach more mainstream audiences". In that context, as Fahmi and Meddeb (2015: 7) further explain,

> While some of the Salafi jihadists who formed Ansar al-Sharia previously believed in the need for armed struggle to establish an Islamic state, the Arab Spring led them to change their tactics and to focus instead on preaching religious ideology to prepare the ground for an Islamic state.

However, this did not prevent AST from being involved in a series of violent actions, attacks and assassinations, including the occupation of Manouba University in 2011, the attack against the US embassy in Tunis in September 2012 and a wave of assassinations that culminated in February 2013 with the murder of Chokri Belaid, a prominent Tunisian intellectual. In this context, in mid-2013 the Tunisian authorities decided to crack down on AST, which was banned and many of its supporters arrested. Those who escaped repression went into hiding and either joined local jihadi cells or went abroad. Abu Ayub al-Tunisi escaped to Syria where he became a prominent preacher

for IS, while the founder and leader of AST, Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi, escaped to Libya where he became one of the most important leaders of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Mourabitoun led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Overall, and as explained by consultant and security expert Habib Sayah, there are no definitive figures on how many people left Tunisia to join the jihad in Syria/Iraq and Libya. However, he considers that the estimates vary between 3,000 and 4,000 young people who left for Syria/Iraq, and at least 1,500 for Libya (Interview G), while in this last case specialists argue that the real figures are most likely much higher (Interviewee 4).

In this regard, Libya rapidly became a major destination for candidates for jihad. According to a specialist, between 2011 and 2015 "the Tunisian–Libyan roads had become a sort of highway for jihadism, i.e. large number of Tunisian candidates for jihad were going to Libya where there was no state, a proliferation of weapons and all kind of other trafficking" (Interviewee 5). Indeed, the chaos in Libya played a pivotal role in helping the Tunisian jihadists, in the sense that they received support from local Libyan jihadist organizations including Ansar al-Sharia of Libya. This enabled them to receive training and weapons in Libya. As such, by 2013 Libya became a rear base for them, from which they would either go to the Middle East or attack their home country.

In addition to this security aspect, the Tunisian economy was directly hit by the Libyan crisis. Indeed, as Huda Mzioudet, a Tunisian expert on Libya, explains,

> the chaos in Libya starting from 2011 directly affected the cross-border trade, a major economic sector for the Tunisian villages and cities on the Libyan borders especially in the city of Ben Guerdane. The collapse of the state in Libya, the civil war, and the closing of the borders, meant the disappearance of the source of revenue (Interview E).

In that context, she explains that another type of economy has replaced this trade, the criminal economy, especially the trafficking of weapons, and particularly in the region of Tataouine. For her, many people in these border regions or close to them were directly affected by the civil war in Libya given the collapse of the cross-border trade. This led to the rise in marginalization, unemployment, poverty and exclusion. This also led to an increase in the attractiveness of radical organizations, especially for the youth, as she noticed that many of the Tunisians who joined the jihad came from these areas, in addition to those from the rest of the country such as Kasserine, Kairouan and Sidi-Bouzid. Furthermore, she also mentions the plight of the large number of Tunisians who were working in Libya, tens of thousands of whom had to come back to their country, fleeing the Libyan chaos. These people were a major source of revenue for thousands of families in Tunisia, and upon their return they were left unemployed as the Tunisian economy was unable to absorb them, thus putting them and their families in dire social-economic conditions.

In that regard, Habib Zitoun, director of the Tunisian Institute of Competitivity, argues that the Libyan crisis posed five major problems for Tunisia: (1) foreign investments, (2) immigration, (3) balance of public accounts, (4) security and (5) business climate, all of which were important for Tunisian economic development and were severely and negatively affected by the Libyan crisis (cited in Bakry 2017). The crisis further affected the Tunisian economy, especially in terms of exports and imports. Libya represented a major market for Tunisian products, while Tunisia imported oil from Libya in large quantities and at a very favourable price under Gaddafi (cited in

Bakry 2017). This analysis of the catastrophic impact of the Libyan crisis on the Tunisian economy was confirmed by a study conducted by the World Bank in 2016. Indeed, the study noted that in the years 2015–16, which constituted the peak of terrorist activity in Tunisia, the number of tourists staying overnight in Tunisia dropped by 55 per cent, while Libyan investments in Tunisia, which were extremely important prior to 2011, dropped by 82 per cent (Sy et al. 2017: 7, 31). This report further explained that

> the Libyan crisis may have contributed 24 percent to the overall drop in Tunisia's growth over the five years from 2011 to 2015. This amounts to a welfare loss of TD 8.8 billion over this time frame, or about US$880 million per year (2 percent of 2015 GDP per year). This welfare loss is driven by the spillover effects of the Libyan crisis on private investment and tourism, which account, respectively, for 60.1 percent and 36 percent of the slowdown in growth. [...] We estimate the fiscal cost of the Libyan crisis on Tunisia (increased government security spending and losses in tax revenue) at TD 5.8 billion over the five years from 2011 to 2015, or US$580 million per year (6.3 percent of 2015 tax revenues per year). (Sy et al. 2017: 2).

In this way, the consequences were catastrophic and severely hit the long-term economic stability of the country, leading to a further increase in poverty and marginalization among the population.

Faced with this major threat, the Tunisian government, supported by the international community, especially France and the United States and its regional allies (Algeria), began to react, though very late, from the end of 2014. Its decisions were swiftly implemented and turned out to be efficient. Indeed, having declared a state of emergency, the authorities took the decision to close the borders with Libya and to build a "protective wall" there, in reality a protection system comprising obstacles, trenches and ultra-modern motion-detector systems. According to Huda Mzioudet "this wall, built with Western support, played a major role in gradually restoring security and considerably reduced the infiltration of jihadists from Libya, which have become now a rarity" (Interview E). In addition, the government collaborated with the internationally recognized GNA in Tripoli, as well as the Libyan tribes living close to the borders and local Libyan militias, to secure the area. For Huda Mzioudet, those militias and tribes, especially the Zuwara militias, played a pivotal role in improving security on the Tunisian–Libyan border. She further explains that since the General National Congress (GNC) was supported by Libya Dawn, which emanated from the Muslim Brotherhood and was very active until late 2016, and therefore close to the Muslim Brotherhood of Libya, it facilitated contacts and cooperation with Tunis. For her, the Ennahda party, themselves Muslim Brothers, had strong relations with their Libyan counterparts. This played an important role in convincing the GNC to take the appropriate measures to secure the borders (Interview E).

In parallel, several agreements were signed with France and the United States, including for the delivery of weapons and training of the Tunisian special forces, as well as advanced surveillance material to monitor the Libyan–Tunisian border and thus reduce the infiltration of jihadists from Libya (Chaouch 2017). In this regard, the decision of the United States to elevate Tunisia to the status of "major non-NATO ally" facilitated the acquisition of advanced material for countering guerrilla warfare by Tunis. Furthermore, the United States established a military facility of surveillance drones in Tunisia. The establishment of this facility included the signing of a Status of

Forces Agreement (SOFA) signalling a sort of strategic partnership established between the two countries (Nadhif 2016). In this way, Western powers demonstrated total support for the Tunisian authorities.

Cooperation with Algeria also played a major role in helping secure the country. In this regard, an Algerian official explained, "we played a key role in preventing Tunisia from collapsing by providing them with information, training their troops, given our experience in fighting against terrorism, and high level of cooperation" (Interviewee 6). Indeed, this cooperation started as soon as terrorism emerged in Tunisia in 2011, with the attacks of the AQIM-sent Okba Ibn Nafaa brigade in Tunisia across the then not well monitored Algerian–Tunisian border, which conducted numerous attacks including the 2015 Bardo Museum attack in which twenty-one Western tourists were killed. Huda Mzioudet explains that Algeria greatly helped in securing the country, given Algiers' experience and expertise in counter-terrorism inherited from the 1990s civil strife, especially in training the Tunisian special forces and intelligence sharing (Interview E).

While the situation has stabilized, a new threat is looming on the Tunisian horizon: the problem of jihadist returnees. Indeed, as Michaël Ayari explains, in the context of the collapse of IS in the Middle East and the persistent critical situation in Libya, the issue of returnees poses a major threat to Tunisian national security (Interview A). Habib Sayah explains that currently some 800 of them have returned to Tunisia and are either in jail or under heavy surveillance. To this number, one must add tens who are detained by the Syrian authorities and hundreds who have died in the fighting there (Interview G). In this context, the figures of those likely to return are hard to assess, but they do nonetheless represent a major threat. Indeed, in the Middle East these fighters have acquired a high level of both military and radical ideological training and first-hand fighting experience, in addition to establishing networks with fellow jihadists from around the world. In this way, they could be extremely dangerous if they either join existing jihadi organizations active in Tunisia itself, with whom "they could share their expertise in the jihad", or if they decide to go to Libya. Libya, at the very least a weak state with an enduring presence of jihadi organizations, could provide an opportunity for these returnees to continue jihad. They could coalesce with organizations present in Libya and strengthen them. However, according to an expert on these issues, the possibility of seeing "a massive migration of jihadists from the Middle East to Libya is unlikely; most of those returnees will be likely to return to their home countries and surrender or stay there [the Middle East] and die fighting" (Interviewee 13). In that sense, there has been an exaggeration of the risk "posed by returnees". However, this expert does point to another, more dangerous risk, that is, if a very small number of hardened, battle-trained and totally radicalized jihadists were to escape to Libya and join their fellow jihadi organizations. For him, these would more dangerous because they would be very difficult, if not impossible, to detect and track until they had arrived, unlike a massive phenomenon. He explains that this has likely already happened, as we have observed several attacks in the Sahel by jihadi organizations using techniques observed in the Middle East. This could pose a major threat to Tunisia (Interviewee 13). As a Tunisian official explained, while the home-grown jihadi groups have been contained, the most dangerous threat comes from Libya and the possibility of a rapprochement between IS and the Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups there in the context of the possible arrival of "returnees" from the Middle East (Interviewee 4). Since 2017 there have been many rumours, albeit unverified, including claims made by Al-Mahdi al-Barghathi, the Libyan defence minister, regarding possible cooperation between IS and Al-Qaeda groups in Libya.

While so far there has been no concrete evidence of such occurrences, it is considered a possible scenario by many Tunisian officials and would represent as a major threat if it were to happen.

2.2 ALGERIA

Algeria is concerned that its eastern borders with Tunisia, Libya and Mali constitute an "arc of threat" headed by Libya. Indeed, a multitude of radical jihadi organizations, whether affiliated with Al-Qaeda, such as AQIM, or IS, consider Algiers a top-priority target. In addition, and in the words of an Algerian official, Libya was an open market for weapons during the 2011–15 period and this situation has had a lasting impact on the security situation that continues today, although since 2016 the number of weapons in circulation from Libya has been drastically reduced. The interviewee asserted that at the time, "anyone with money could acquire any kind of weapons in Libya and as such the huge proliferation of light weapons in the region constituted a major risk for the security of Algeria" (Interviewee 2). A former Algerian minister of foreign affairs in this context explained that "for Algeria, this situation made Libya part of its first national security circle [...] to that extent, the situation there is not a foreign security problem but rather a national security problem" (Interviewee 12). As Yahia Zoubir notes, Algeria does not accept foreign support for Libya's rival governments and their armed allies since it has historically always rejected any foreign military presence or intervention in general, so one can imagine how Algiers would react in its immediate neighbourhood (Interview H).

For Algeria, the Libyan crisis is above all a security problem. Indeed, previously economic ties between Algeria and Libya were extremely limited, with very few if any goods traded between the two and a very small Algerian community of workers living in Libya. Unlike for Tunisia, the economic impact of the Libyan crisis on the country was almost non-existent due to the fact that Algeria's main source of revenue is its oil exports. On the other hand, the security vacuum in its neighbouring country created a significant security threat. For this reason Algeria has two main objectives in Libya: (1) to re-establish stability and security to prevent radical jihadist groups in Libya using it as a rear base to attack Algeria; and (2) to maintain a regional balance of power especially towards Egypt, since Algeria does not want Libya to become a client state of Cairo (Taylor 2018). Given the situation, and the fact that it is considered a *de facto* regional power in North Africa, Algeria has been pressured by European countries, especially France, to intervene militarily in Libya. However, so far Algeria has systematically refused to do so based on the fact that the Algerian constitution forbids the deployment of troops abroad and that Algerian foreign policy is opposed by definition to "foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of a country" (Interviewee 7).

Regarding the first goal, and as journalist and security expert Akram Kharief explains, the Algerian concern with Libya is no longer about the dissemination of weapons, or at least not as it was in the past, but rather that it is "a total safe haven for the armed organizations, especially in south-western Libya, with those organizations affiliated to AQIM or IS" (Interview C). This is especially the case in the city of Sabratha, where Tunisian fighters of IS had established camps which could threaten both Tunisia (Varvelli 2017) and Algeria. Several leaders of AQIM were killed in late 2016, and more recently since the beginning of 2018, in US raids, including one in the city of Sabha, including Abu

Talha al-Libi, a prominent emir of the organization.[26] The strong connections and presence of the Algerian jihadi leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar's organization in Libya, Al-Mourabitoun, directly responsible for the dramatic January 2013 hostage-taking at the Tigentourine natural gas facility in south-east Algeria, remains in the memories of security officials. As such, for Algeria, which shares a border with many weak states (Mali, Niger), Libya represents a country full of ungoverned spaces with uncontrolled actors. For Akram Kharief, the various jihad organizations, regardless of their allegiances, have taken advantage of the "state vacuum" in Libya and are trying to organize themselves and combine their forces to attack the region, and therefore directly threaten Algeria (Interview C).

In order to face this threat, Algeria has decided to follow a dual-track policy. The first track is a military strategy that attempts to hermetically seal the Algerian–Libyan border through a massive military deployment. According to Akram Kharief, more than 35,000 soldiers and members of the security services have been deployed on the Libyan border, in addition to the building of small forts every 50 kilometres, and the use of surveillance aircraft and helicopters (Interview C). In fact, a total of 80,000 soldiers have been deployed on the Tunisian–Libyan–Malian borders by the Algerian army. A former Algerian diplomat and expert in security issues further explained that "Algeria has launched 5 satellites in the past few years which allow the security services to have a satellite coverage of the territory and increase the control of the borders" (Interviewee 8). This ability turned out to be of critical importance given that the Algerian–Libyan border is over 900 km and has no natural barriers. The army has been able to intercept several attempts to infiltrate Algeria from Libya, and according to Akram Kharief, "when a jihadi convoy is detected attempting to enter Algeria, it is intercepted inside Algeria itself and bombed by the Algerian air force, sometimes they do it as well directly on the Libyan side of the borders" (Interview C).

In addition, Algiers has been actively cooperating with the major powers in the area of security, especially with France. However, one of the major issues at stake was the pressure put on Algeria to directly intervene militarily in Libya. In that regard, and as explained by a security analyst and a former security official, "Algeria has been under constant pressure to intervene militarily in Libya and on that issue, there is a consensus among the major powers on the need to intervene militarily, Algeria is and will be therefore under intense pressure" (Interviewee 9). Akram Kharief considers that from a strictly military point of view, Algeria does have projection capabilities as indicated by its impressive deployment on the borders, and it is thus capable of conducting military operations beyond its borders. For him, "the south and east is totally covered by the army and as such it has the capacity to intervene on the borders and abroad [i.e. Libya and the Sahel] directly from the existing military facilities in the areas such as in Tigentourine, Bordj Baji Mokhtar, etc." However, according to the security analyst, there are several issues at stake here, including the risk of "getting bogged down in the Libyan conflict, the fact that the population will not accept it and might lead the jihadi groups in Algeria such as AQIM to use this to launch terrorist attacks" (Interview C). In this regard, Akram Kharief argues that the Algerian army does not want to be seen as an auxiliary of the Western powers, which would play into the propaganda of jihadi organizations. Mohamed Mokeddem (aka Anis Rahmani), journalist and expert in jihadi groups, explains that the Algerian army, while it does have projection capabilities, remains essentially a defensive army and

26 See "Air Strike Targeting Militants Kills Seven in Southern Libya: Official", in *Reuters*, 15 November 2016, http://reut.rs/2fTdzO6.

hence shares the concerns about becoming "bogged down" in a long conflict in the Libyan desert (Interview D). For our security analyst,

> an Algerian military intervention could be considered in the region only if there is an important participation of the major powers with the UN approval, then an eventual participation of the regional powers, including Algeria, could be considered, but even in this scenario it would not be a good idea (Interviewee 9).

This leads to the second track of the Algerian strategy in Libya: the restoration of peace and security by rebuilding a government through a process of negotiations between all the factions involved in the conflict – what the Algerian authorities call the political solution. This concept of a political solution to solve the conflict is directly derived from the Algerian experience of the 2000s, referred to as the "national reconciliation", which ended the civil war. According to an Algerian diplomat,

> this concept, however, somehow not clearly defined, rests on two essential elements which are (1) the refusal of any kind of intervention in the domestic affairs of a country, especially military intervention, given that the ones that have occurred seldom work and lead to an aggravation of the conflicts such as in Iraq or Libya, in addition to the fact this could open the door to any kind of unjustified action [any kind of intervention]; (2) putting in place an inclusive dialogue with all the parties involved in a conflict, a dialogue in which Algeria could play a major role, i.e. the role of mediator, the goal being to end the conflict through a political agreement (Interviewee 7).

In practice, however, Algeria was closer to the GNC given the perception of its proximity with the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, Algeria since the late 1990s and 2000s has integrated the Muslim Brotherhood in Algeria into its strategy of stabilization to counter the radicals, and in this way has developed links and relations with this organization and therefore was naturally closer to the GNC (Interview C). On this issue specifically, a former Algerian diplomat commented, "we have relations and good ones with Ismail al-Salabi and [Abdelhakim] Belhaj" (Interviewee 8), both Salafists but closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar, thus underlining the preferences of Algiers.

Algeria also relied heavily on the Libyan tribes in order to stabilize the situation (Interviewee 8). An illustration of this is the visit of Abdelkader Messahel, the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who as part of the Algerian mediation efforts visited Libya in April 2017 and met with several Libyan officials in addition to tribal leaders, thus signalling the need to involve those major actors in the solution. However, by doing so, and while not formally rejecting the Tobruk parliament and its Al-Bayda government, supported by the strongman Khalifa Haftar, Algiers has systematically recognized the GNA as the legal government of Libya. One of the main reasons for this is the proximity of Haftar to Egypt, as Algiers wants to limit or contain Cairo's influence in Libya, as well as Haftar's close proximity with the USA, which makes him suspicious in the eyes of Algeria (Interviewee 8). In addition, his military Operation Dignity was aimed at ridding Libya of all the jihadi groups but also targeted the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization with which Algeria was in contact as part of its mediation strategy. Moreover, as Jalel Harchaoui explains, another problem with Haftar's operation was the fact that he wanted a green light to intervene in Western Libya which Algiers refused to give because it would be total chaos on its door (cited in De Saint

Perier 2018b). Haftar, aware of these difficult relations and unwilling to draw closer to Algiers, clearly assumed his actions and the problems these created with Algiers. As such, he stated in an interview in 2018 that "the Muslim Brothers, responsible for the arrival of the terrorists in Libya, must have no involvement in the electoral process" (cited in De Saint Perier 2018a). By saying this, he was reflecting negatively on the process launched by Algeria, for whom the integration of the Muslim Brotherhood was critical in any peace process. Therefore his stand on the Muslim Brothers could only be perceived negatively by Algiers. In addition, his initiatives interfered as well with some of the tribal mechanisms on which Algiers was relying in its mediation efforts (Interview C). Reflecting these tensions with Algiers, when asked about his opinion on the process of mediation initiated by Algeria, Haftar bluntly replied, "I did not know that there was an initiative on its part. As far as I am concerned, Algeria was never an intermediary" (cited in De Saint Perier 2018a).

Several elements need to be considered here. Firstly, and as Akram Kharief notes, since 2016–17 Haftar has started a process of rapprochement with Russia given the convergence of the two actors on how to deal with the jihadist groups. This rapprochement culminated in January 2017 in Haftar's visit to the Russian aircraft carrier Kuznetsov, which was followed in August of the same year by his visit to Moscow, during which he met with Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. There have also been persistent, albeit unconfirmed, rumours that Moscow had agreed to supply him with weapons. This led to a revision of Algeria's stand towards Haftar, given that Moscow remains at the international level "the most important strategic partner of Algeria". In this context, Moscow asked Algiers to tentatively include Haftar in its mediation efforts and to soften its position towards him (Interview C). Moreover, and as the former Algerian diplomat explained, "contrary to a wide-spread belief, Algiers knows well Haftar with whom it was in touch in the 1990s to counter Gaddafi's Libya although those contacts did not go very far, given his very close relations back then with the United States and now with Egypt". However, for him, "Algiers' friends are as much in Tripoli as in Benghazi [HQ of Haftar]". He further explains that "in fact, in Libya, Algiers had contacts with all the parties, it is one of the few countries that tried to remain equidistant from all the factions in spite of some leaning to the west [GNA]" (Interviewee 8). Another Algerian official in that regard explained that "we (Algeria) have systematically refused to deliver weapons to any of the parties in spite of multiple requests from many of them; this allows us in turn to be neutral mediators" (Interviewee 2). In this context, Haftar was received in Algiers in late 2016 by Abdelmalek Sellal, then Prime Minister of Algeria. Furthermore, Algeria supported the process initiated by Paris for reconciliation culminating in the Paris agreement of July 2017. This agreement, signed under French mediation, essentially met Algeria's key demands. It is a consensual agreement integrating all the factions favourable to a political solution, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and their commitment to mobilize themselves to expel from Libya all the jihad organizations present there to prevent the establishment of any connections with the Group in Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), affiliated with IS, both currently operating in the Sahel. To conclude, as the former diplomat explained "Algeria has and wanted to have contacts with all the parties, however, the problem was to find ones whose agenda is not part of a foreign one", that is, to have an autonomous post-Gaddafi Libya, especially from Egypt (Interviewee 8). The presence of Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia in May 2018 at the Paris conference organized to press forward the 2017 agreement underlines the decision by Algeria to support the initiative, which

includes power-sharing with Haftar.

In the long run, however, the situation remains critical and difficult. The restoration of state authority in Libya, especially in the south, for the time being seems very difficult. Indeed, for many observers and analysts the Fezzan region has become a major source of concern given that after the various military operations launched by the GNA and the Haftar camps, the jihadists have escaped to this region and seem to be regrouping. Worse, there are conflicting reports of the establishment of cooperation between IS groups and Al-Qaeda affiliates. This could be a major threat given that southern Libya is connected to the Sahel, a major source of concern for regional powers and the international community due to the presence of powerful jihadi groups there as well as the enduring weakness of the states of the region.

2.3 THE SAHEL

Since 2011, most specialists have concurred that the security dynamics in North Africa directly affect the Sahel and vice versa. Indeed, the collapse of Mali in 2012 was the direct result of the collapse of the Gaddafi regime and the return to northern Mali of thousands of Tuaregs from Libya. Conversely, the attack of January 2013 in Algeria against the In Amenas natural gas facility was planned and organized from Mali by the Al-Mourabitoun jihadi organization led by Belmokhtar. The commando that conducted the attack came from northern Mali across the by then ungoverned southern Libya and struck Algeria. Moreover, in the aftermath of the French military Operation Serval to retake control from the jihad coalition formed by AQIM, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and Ansar al-Din, the jihad fighters fled to southern Libya where they were to reconstitute their forces and from there restart their attack against northern Mali. To that extent, the situation in Libya directly affects the security situation in the Sahel. As a Mauritanian diplomat explained, "the collapse of Libya is the direct cause for the current situation in the Sahel. The future of the terrorist risk in the region is that Libya will be split in different parts and becomes a sort of Afghanistan, a new Jihadistan" (Interviewee 10).

In reality the collapse of Libya in 2011 accelerated a process of disintegration of the Sahel that had started in the early 2000s, when the then Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which became AQIM, established itself in northern Mali and then started attacking the weak regional states, including Mauritania, Mali and Niger. They also took tens of Western hostages who were released in exchange for ransoms. By 2011, experts estimated that hostage takings had generated over 160 million euros in revenues for AQIM, making it the richest armed non-state actor in the region. Furthermore, AQIM got itself involved in all kinds of trafficking in the region, establishing solid relations with the local mafias and generating additional sources of revenues for itself. AQIM also established a policy of rapprochement with local jihad organizations and leaders including Boko Haram and Iyad Ag Ghali, a local Tuareg leader considered a hero by the local populations. This once separatist Tuareg leader had, over the years, become a Salafi jihadi leader. Finally, AQIM had established solid relations with the local populations through an intelligent strategy of socialization by helping the local marginalized people and establishing alliances through marriages. By 2011, AQIM was not only the richest non-state armed actor in the region, it was also the strongest, with an estimated force of more than 1,200 well-armed men entrenched in the Sahel. All this took place in the context of the decomposition of the Malian state in northern regions.

Thus the Libyan crisis only accelerated the process of disintegration and collapse of northern Mali in 2012. The fall of the Gaddafi regime gave jihad groups including AQIM access to the huge numbers of weapons taken from the stocks of the Libyan army. In that regard, the French-led Operation Serval in 2013 and Operation Barkhane starting from 2014, according to Serge Daniel, "did not solve the problem. Hundreds of jihadists were killed including key leaders. However, the jihadists had simply to retreat to somewhere else including to southern Libya where they established safe heavens" (Interview B). According to a Mauritanian security official,

> the problem of Libya is of paramount importance. The absence of any kind of control in this country presents three problems: (1) the influence of the weapons that come from Libya and from which all the transnational armed actors have benefited, (2) the development of all kinds of trafficking including illegal immigration among many others, [and] (3) Libya has become a rear base of jihadi organizations (Interviewee 11).

Indeed, in mid-2013, Isselmou Ould Moustapha, a Mauritanian journalist and specialist in jihadi organizations in the Sahel, explained that

> after Serval, AQIM and its allies have learned their lesson and will not try to retake control of territories, they have learned from their 2012 mistake [taking control of northern Mali and provoking an international crisis], rather they will seek to deploy themselves in areas where there is no state and from which they will be able to reorganize themselves and entertain the idea of the jihad (Interview F).

A Mauritanian official, for her part, explained that "we need to understand that these are transnational interconnected guerrilla groups acting in the whole Sahel region, not just in Mali. They help each other and provide each other with rear bases where each can retreat" (Interviewee 3). As such, a study by Conflict Armament Research (2016) on the weapons in the Sahel region explained that since 2013, a large number of weapons have been discovered, destroyed or seized in northern Mali, especially in the regions of Tessalit, Kidal and Gao. A significant quantity of these were weapons sold to Libya in the 1970s by Poland. In addition, SAM 7 missiles from the Libyan stocks were also seized in December 2014 in the region of Gao. Furthermore, and for another international official, while the majority of the weapons seized in Mali come first from the stocks of the Malian army acquired through corruption or captured by jihadists in 2012, the collapse of Libya has without any doubt increased both the quality and quantity of the weapons at the disposal of jihadists, including 88 millimetre shells. This shows clearly that those jihadists were able to acquire, through their networks of support, large quantities of weapons which have since then been used across the whole Sahelian region.

Facing this, and in spite of a major effort from the international community and the French operations, Mali has not been able to restore its authority in the northern part of the country and remains an enduring weak state. Worse still, since 2014 the jihadi organizations have started to return to the Sahel and to expand across the region, striking far away from their traditional areas including in Burkina Faso and Senegal. In March 2017, all of the Al-Qaeda affiliates merged into a single organization, the Group in Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM). Moreover, since May 2015

IS has established itself in the region in the name of its affiliate the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), led by Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, a former associate of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the emir of Al-Mourabitoun. Those two organizations are the most dangerous non-state armed actors in the Sahel, with solid connections to the GSIM in Libya. The collapse of IS and other jihadists factions in northern Libya and the retreat of several of these to Fezzan, southern Libya, currently constitute one of the most dangerous scenarios for the Sahel in the sense that the junction of these retreating groups with their Sahelian counterparts could further destabilize the situation in the Sahel.

CONCLUSION

Libya remains one of the most significant concerns for the countries of the North African/Sahelian regional system. Due to its geographic centrality in the region, the enduring instability in Libya directly affects the security of its neighbours. To date Algeria and Tunisia have been able to withstand and deflect the dangers from their eastern neighbour, but not without a heavy cost. Both remain concerned about the situation there and consider it the most dangerous threat to their national security. The same assessment is made in the Sahel, but with much greater concern given the enduring weakness of the region's states and their inability to control their borders in the context of an ever increasing and resilient jihadist threat. The states in the Sahel consider the situation in the Fezzan region in southern Libya problematic, while there has been a major upsurge in jihad activities in the Sahel itself since 2017. This makes them in turn heavily reliant on foreign support and intervention, especially from France, to ensure their security. However, here again, after five years of direct military involvement, Paris and its allies seem tempted to disengage from the Sahel by following a strategy which one might call "the Sahelization of the conflict" by developing and promoting a new security initiative: the G5 Sahel. The goal of this initiative is to create a common force composed of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso with French support to confront jihad organizations in the Sahel. So far, however, the implementation of this initiative has proved very difficult, and while the first operations by the G5 forces have only recently started with some successes, they still seem far from regaining control of the situation.

In the meantime, new trends have emerged in Libya, such as changes in the nature of illegal cross-border economic activities, particularly the growth of human trafficking and alleged illegal inward migration into southern Libya. Although there are no statistics to indicate the extent to which this inward migration and settlement is occurring, it has become a highly sensitive issue in Libyan popular perception and is likely to further complicate unresolved political issues linked to southern Libya's non-Arab minorities, ethnic groups which extend through much of the Sahel. The likely militarization of some recent migrants into Libya and the widespread rejection within Libya of their permanent settlement there means that the fates of these migrants could well have a regional impact in the medium to long term. Just as there has been a tendency to overlook dynamics related to migration in Libya or to view them in a depoliticized way, the political nature of the fight against terrorism in the country has sometimes been underestimated in the light of security concerns. This too has the potential to increase instability in the region in the medium to long term through driving increased radicalization, if it is not taken into account now.

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ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interviewee 1: former Algerian minister of foreign affairs, June 2014

Interviewee 2: Algerian official, Algiers, January 2015

Interviewee 3: Mauritanian official, Nouakchott, August 2013

Interviewee 4: Tunisian official, Tunis, March 2018

Interviewee 5: Tunisian expert on jihadi groups, Tunis, March 2018

Interviewee 6: Algerian official, Algiers, November 2017

Interviewee 7: Algerian diplomat, Algiers, January 2018

Interviewee 8: former Algerian diplomat and expert in security issues, Algiers, January 2018

Interviewee 9: former security official and now security expert analyst, Algiers, January 2018

Interviewee 10: Mauritanian diplomat, Nouakchott, 2013

Interviewee 11: Mauritanian security official, Nouakchott, 2013

Interviewee 12: former Algerian minister of foreign affairs, Algiers, September 2012

Interviewee 13: European expert close to those issues, January 2018

Interviewee 14: Libyan civil society activist based in Tripoli, phone interview, May 2018

Interviewee 15: Libyan researcher based in Tripoli, phone interview, June 2018

Interview A: Michaël Béchir Ayari, Tunisia Senior Analyst for the International Crisis Group (ICG), Tunisia, March 2018

Interview B: Serge Daniel, journalist and specialist in jihadi organizations, Bamako, March 2018

Interview C: Akram Kharief, journalist and security expert, Algiers, January 2018

Interview D: Mohamed Mokeddem, Algerian expert on terrorism and director of the national newspaper Ennahar, Algiers, June 2014

Interview E: Huda Mzioudet, expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Tunis, March 2018

Interview F: Isselmou Ould Moustapha, journalist and specialist in jihad organizations in the Sahel, August 2013

Interview G: Habib M. Sayah, consultant and security expert, Tunis, March 2018

Interview H: Yahia H. Zoubir , Professor at Kedge School of Business, phone interview, May 2018

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